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## Balancing Act for a Chamber

*By Sophie Braccini*

It can be tricky to occupy the hot seat of local government—needing to make sound financial decisions yet ensure that the electorate understands the motivation and consistency behind each vote. At its last meeting, the Moraga Town Council wrestled with that problem as it decided in a 4 to 1 vote to pursue the study, and later construction, of a 105-seat meeting room in the Town's office building at 329 Rheem Boulevard. The Council wondered if the added expense would be understood by voters who will soon be asked to contribute more money to road and drain maintenance. "It's about perception," said Council Member Dave Trotter, the dissenting vote.

Council Member Ken Chew, in a discussion about municipal finance mechanisms, noted, "That money could not be used for roads anyway."

"What happens is that when developers pay a town fee per housing unit built, a portion of that money has to be used for Town capital improvement," explained Vice Mayor Mike Metcalf after the meeting, "it cannot be used for roads or drains. Consequently, if the money is not spent for that type of use, it is lost."

The project is considered cost-effective at this time, since remodeling and retrofit activities are getting underway at the building; the addition of the large room, which could function as a Council Chamber and site for other community meetings, would add about \$200,000 to the overall cost that is estimated at roughly \$1.5 million. The Town currently rents meeting space for the Council at Joaquin Moraga Intermediate School.

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